

Outdoor FOCUS

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE OWPG / SPRING 2026

The Editor Writes Welcome to the Spring issue of Outdoor Focus. We have an exciting couple of months ahead. March sees both the annual Photography and Video Show, and the National Outdoor Expo, both in Birmingham. OWPG will be at National Outdoor Expo with a stand and banner promoting the OWPG and members' work. A little further ahead in early June, Liverpool hosts the 20th annual Outdoor Trade Show in partnership with the Outdoor Industries Association (OIA). If you are going to be at any of these events and would be willing to write up a short report for Outdoor Focus, please do let me know. In the meantime, we also have upcoming Zoom talks with Author and Natural Navigator Tristan Gooley on the 18th March and Adam King, CEO of Harvey Maps on the 15th April.



International Festival, alongside talks about the past, present and future of the park. There will also be a special programme of guided walks led by park rangers across the year, and a new 'tube-style' map of the Peak District highlighting trails, travel links and lesser-known places.

Perhaps most significantly, the event marks the launch of an anniversary report commissioned with three other national parks calling for policy change and sustainable funding to secure the future for our most treasured landscapes. It would be easy to assume that our parks are well-established and secure, but the UK is one of the few countries in the world that doesn't own the majority of land in its national parks. Consequently management of land is a complex issue. In addition to the funding issue, there are threats from energy and infrastructure projects, major road development, access and inclusion challenges, water pollution and ecological health issues linked to land use, habitat and wildlife protection, and of course, the ever-present issue of second homes and holiday lets. There is much to celebrate, but much still to do, so as media professionals whose life and work depends on people's access to the natural landscape, let's keep the issues at the forefront of our work.

In our main feature for this issue, Guild vice president and former Head of Information at the Peak District National Park, Roly Smith explores the events that led up to the founding of the park which celebrates its 75th anniversary this year on the 17th April. It is a significant milestone for Britain's first national park and is being celebrated with events that include 'Un-earthed', a photographic exhibition in partnership with Buxton

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Know someone?

Do you know someone who could benefit from and enjoy membership of the Guild? Why not reach out to them with the ['new member discount'](#) offer found on the website under 'downloads and discounts'.

Submission deadline for the Summer issue is 30th April.

Don't miss..

If you're heading to the **National Outdoor Expo** in Birmingham on the 21st-22nd March come and find the OWPG stand! OWPG Member Natasha Sones is speaking on the 22nd on the Interactive Stage from 10:15am.

ZOOM 18th March: **Author & Natural Navigator Tristan Gooley** talks to OWPG member, Rachel Mead, about his career. Book [here](#) or details on email from 26th Feb.



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The Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild (OWPG) is the only UK-based association of media professionals working largely or entirely on outdoor subjects. Our membership covers every field of activity and all corners of the globe. We include writers, journalists, bloggers, photographers, publishers and editors, all with a passionate interest in the outdoors. For information on who we are, what we do, and where we've been, visit www.owpg.org.uk – or join us on Facebook.

Seasonal Images

This season Chris Howes challenges our perception of 'Spring' and takes a different interpretation with the cover image and this collection of images from Yellowstone National Park.

Seasonal Images

Showcase your photography in
Outdoor Focus!

Submit your seasonal images to
feature in the magazine.

A selection of the best images
appropriate to the season submit-
ted each quarter will be featured
in the magazine, with the cover
photo selected from the submit-
sions.

Don't miss the opportunity to
feature; submit yours to [editor@
owpg.org.uk](mailto:editor@owpg.org.uk)



HARVEY Maps

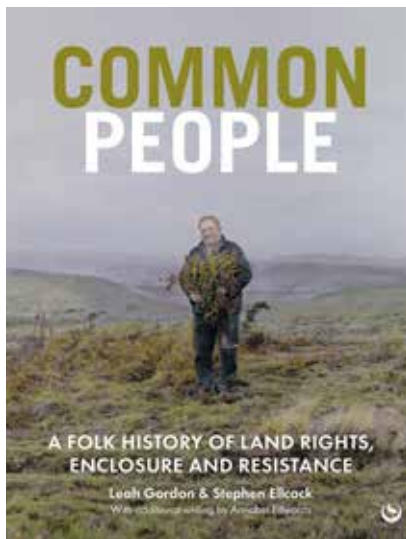
The journey matters: why we do what we do.

A webinar by Adam King | CEO HARVEY Maps
April 15th, 7.30pm

Tried & trusted waterproof maps since 1977
15% OFF at www.harveymaps.co.uk | use code **OWPGMAP15**



OWPG's Roly Smith reviews the latest outdoor books



Common People: A Folk History of land rights, Enclosure and Resistance

Leah Gordon & Stephen Elcock
Watkins Publishing, £26.99 (hb)

This weighty 240-page tome is an attractive pictorial, mainly photographic, account of the enclosure of what was once common land in England, and the centuries-old struggle to reclaim it.

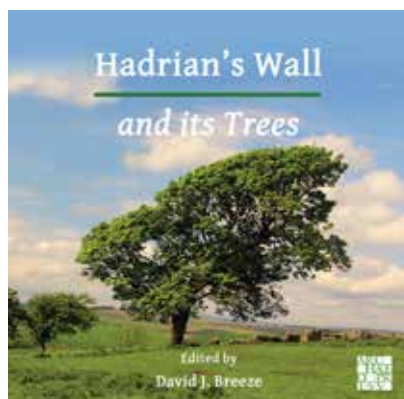
The story starts with the Norman Conquest and the parcelling out of the land by William the Conqueror to his cronies, through to the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, Gerald Winstanley's Diggers, Northamptonshire poet John Clare and the Enclosure Acts of the 18th and 19th centuries, right up to the Right to Roam and trespass movements of today.

Along the way, through the photography of Stephen Elcock and artwork by various artists over the years, it highlights rural rebels and traditions, vagabonds, and even common-or-garden allotments, although quite why the iconic Mass Trespass of Kinder Scout in 1932 is classified under the latter heading eludes me. And nowhere in the book does it mention the rather important fact that five trespassers were actually imprisoned after the event.

The equally important but often overlooked Winter Hill trespass of 1896, in which up to 12,000 people demanded their right to access Col Richard Ainsworth's grouse moors near Bolton, is more comprehensively covered in the "Arise

Albion!" chapter about mass protests. The Kinder Trespass receives a passing mention here, but again there's no reference to the subsequent imprisonments.

The chapter introductions by Leah Gordon and Annabel Edwards are detailed and comprehensive, and one of the real highlights of this important, welcome and far-reaching book.



Hadrian's Wall and its Trees

Ed. David Breeze
Archaeopress, £29.99 (pb)

Mention trees on Hadrian's Wall and it's a fair bet that most people will think of one in particular. The senseless felling of the Sycamore Gap in 2023 rightly attracted worldwide indignation and outrage, and it is covered with appropriate gravitas in this handsome book, which is graced by line drawings by former Guild committee member Mark Richards.

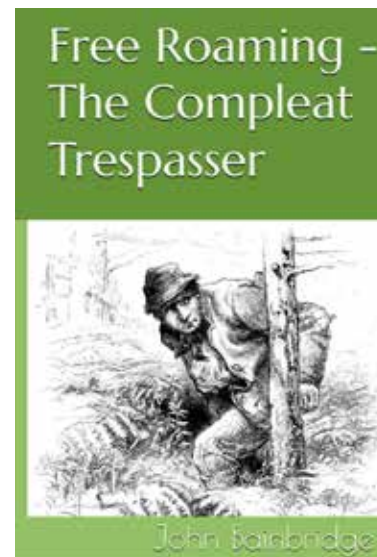
Unfortunately, as happened in its predecessor, *Hadrian's Wall in our Time* (2024), Richards' drawings are too often blown up to an extent which destroys their definition. And I found the absence of captions to most of the pictures rather frustrating.

But this richly-illustrated book has fascinating contributions from about 50 distinguished scholars, archaeologists, artists and heritage specialists about the arboreal attractions of the Wall. It explores how trees have shaped the story of Hadrian's Wall from their use in Roman construction work and everyday life to their appearance in art, myth, and conservation in more modern times. The essays range from studies of ancient

woodlands and Roman carpentry to reflections on individual trees that have become landmarks in their own right. One example is the venerable yew in the churchyard at Beltingham, which possibly even predates the Wall and is attributed with having "an animal energy" by Guild member Susie White in the accompanying essay.

In addition to the major contributions by Breeze and Richards, contributors also include three members of the Birley family, which has spent several generations excavating and reconstructing the fort at Vindolanda; Paul Frodsham, former archaeologist with the Northumberland National Park, and Tony Gates, current chief executive of the National Park. The trunk of the felled tree now forms the centrepiece of an installation by artist Charlie Whinney at The Sill, the National Park's National Landscape Discovery Centre at Twice Brewed.

The book expertly weaves together science, history, and emotion, demonstrating how trees, both ancient and modern, continue to give meaning to the Hadrian's Wall landscape, in what the editor calls "a testament to renewal and continuity."



Free Roaming – The Compleat Trespasser

John Bainbridge
Self published, £8.99 (pb)

This is the third, expanded edition of the author's seminal *The Compleat Trespasser*, first published in 2014, and it re-examines the issues dealt with previously, bringing the story of the Right to Roam movement and threats to the countryside bang up to date.

It's a sad fact that the English and Welsh public still only have the right to roam

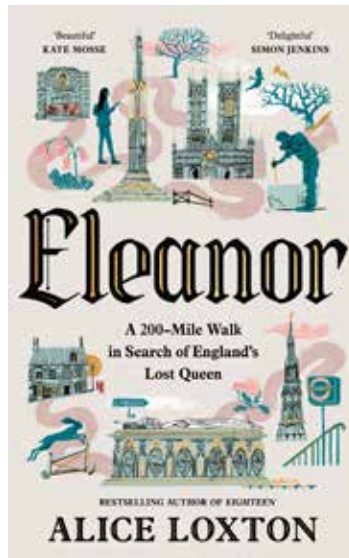
freely on foot on only eight per cent of their countryside, when just one per cent of the population own 50 per cent of the country, and where common land has been reduced to just three per cent of the total.

Incorrigible trespasser Bainbridge directs his eagle, forensic eye at why the British were – and still are – denied responsible access to so much of their own country. And he graphically shows how events through history have led to the countryside being the preserve of the few rather than the many.

He claims that we should no longer think of ourselves as trespassers but become, echoing his title (which he first came up with as an alternative to trespassers some 50 years ago), what he dubs “Free Roamers”, claiming back the land that has been stolen from us. And he suggests the revival of the Ramblers’ former annual Forbidden Britain day as a positive step to persuade the politicians and lawmakers give us the same rights of access enjoyed by our cousins in Scotland.

In an always entertaining and readable narrative, he tells stories of how we lost our rights to the land from Scotland to the south coast, and from the Lake District to Dartmoor, and how, by campaigning, we could get it back. Among these are the fights to regain the right to roam over Winter Hill in Lancashire, Kinder Scout in the Peak District, Lattig Fell in the Lake District, and the more recent battles at Vixen Tor on Dartmoor.

This is an impassioned *cri de coeur* from one of our leading access campaigners for the people of Britain to join him in becoming Free Roamers, to take back our ancient freedoms and be able to explore the entirety of our countryside.



Eleanor: A 200-mile Walk in Search of England's Lost Queen

Alice Loxton

Macmillan, £22 (hb)

As far as I know, up to now there's no 'Eleanor's Way' following the 180-mile journey taken in 1290 by Queen Eleanor of Castile's funeral procession from her deathbed at Harby in Lincolnshire to Westminster Abbey in London. But the publication of popular historian Loxton's epic but always fascinating journey retracing the steps of that journey of 737 years ago, surely merits such a memorial.

Apparently, there's a Queen Eleanor Cycle Ride, which takes place every August Bank Holiday in aid of London's homeless, but Loxton believes she was the first walker in modern times to complete the 180-mile journey (plus more than a few diversions) on foot.

If you have a recent book that you'd like us to review here, please get in touch with Roly: roly.smith@hotmail.com

Eleanor's heartbroken husband, King Edward 1, famously commissioned 12 ornate Gothic stone crosses to be erected at the stopping places where the funeral cortege rested overnight on their journey across England. Of these, only three of the 13th century originals – at Geddington, Hardingstone (now part of Northampton) and Waltham Cross – remain today, while others have been reconstructed (as at Stamford and Charing Cross in London). As the author explains, this is not a classic walking guidebook, neither is it an historical biography of Eleanor, although we learn much about the life of this intelligent but often-overlooked queen. In addition to the often muddy, mid-winter walk it is, says Loxton, “a tapestry of (her) life and its legacy” conducted by an historian who admits from the start that she is not a serious walker – “more a rambler from pub to pub.”

Along the way, starting in the company of her Mum and later with assorted friends, and she comes across many reminders of Eleanor's final journey, from the tiled walls of a London tube station, a statue in a shopping centre, an enormous mural on a house, to even a roundabout which is somewhat romantically named the “Queen Eleanor Interchange.”

But essentially, this is a delightful and fascinating journey through the English countryside, enlivened by Loxton's keen historian's eye and her unbounded enthusiasm to impart her deep-seated love of the past to the reader. In this, she succeeds brilliantly.

Opportunities

Committee Secretary

Do you think you're fairly organised? Would you like to be more involved and contribute to the beating heart of the OWPG - the Committee? An opportunity exists to take on the role as OWPG Secretary. If you'd like to express an interest, please email Josephine at chair@owpg.org.uk.

OWPG Treasurer

Our long-serving Treasurer Gordon is reluctantly stepping down in October. Good with numbers? Keen to see your membership fees spent well? It could be YOU! Again, if you'd like to express an interest, please email Josephine at chair@owpg.org.uk.

Have more fun - join us on the Committee!

'Then & now' - share yours!

What changes have been prominent or poignant in your outdoor adventures over the years?

It might be access, opportunity, equipment, or clothing. Perhaps it's introspective - how have you changed?

Keep it positive, and submit yours to editor@owpg.org.uk

600 words & 2-4 images

The BIG Weekend '26

YHA Conwy, 2nd - 5th October 2026



A BIG weekend thank you to Kevin Sene

For the past few years, Kevin has been our BIG Weekend organiser with fantastic activities, accommodation and facilities organised for our membership. As we roll into 2026, Kevin hands over his role to Sam Davis. While Sam will be leading the organisation of the weekend from now on, Kevin will still be helping in the background with a (very much appreciated!) handover of the role.

THANK YOU KEVIN!

Conwy – A Walled Town of Wonder

This year, the OWPG will descend upon the town of Conwy for the BIG Weekend 2026. With pens at the ready, instead of swords, we will explore this fascinating market town and surroundings. Complete with thirteenth-century castle and walls, harbour and Grade 1 suspension bridge, Conwy is one of Europe's best-preserved medieval towns. Surrounding the town are the peaks of northern Eryri and glorious beaches, including neighbouring sea-side resort, Llandudno. With a rich and

enchanting history, the county of Conwy showcases castles, stone circles, druid artefacts, and more.

YHA Conwy

The OWPG will take up residence at YHA Conwy, the highest altitude and tallest building in the township, and Kevin and I visited the site in December. Within the building, we will have exclusive use of the meeting room over the weekend, for our book tables, AGM and presentations. There is also a games room, restaurant area, bar and small library at the top of the building. Being situated upon high, you get panoramic views of the mountains and sea. Twin, triple (double + single) rooms are all available via the OWPG when we release the booking forms.

Weekend Activities

The weekend will have a mix of workshops, walks and adventure activities, along with the AGM, annual meal and awards ceremony on the Saturday evening. As before with BIG Weekend activities, there will be organised and tutored workshops, such as photo walks, but also self-guided activities such as castle and museum visits. The town

of Conwy boasts an array of shops, pubs, cafes and restaurants to indulge in over the weekend. As always, the book tables will be full of visual delights from OWPG members to peruse in the meeting room.

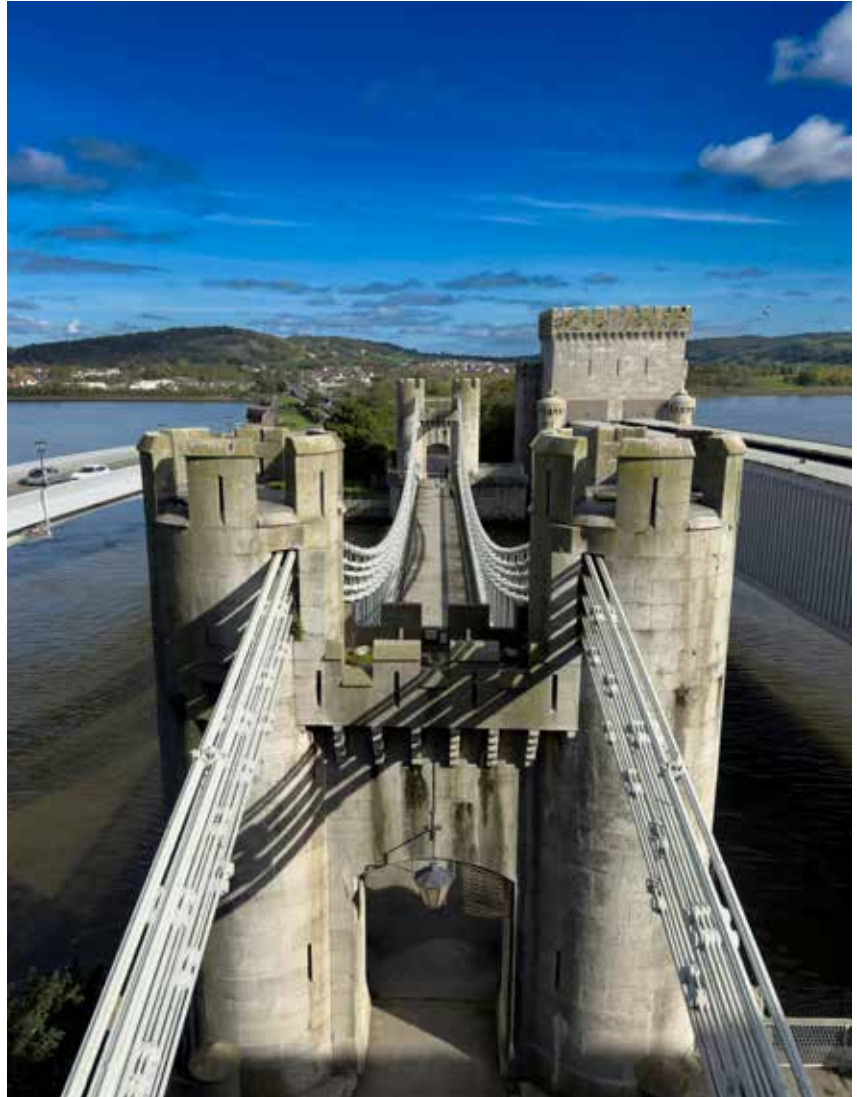
Getting There

Conwy is easily accessible via the A55 dual carriageway that goes along the north coast of Wales. Parking is available at YHA Conwy. As always, we encourage people to share lifts where possible to reduce carbon emissions. You can also reach Conwy via train, with the station situated in the centre of town, just a 10-15 minute walk to the venue.

What's Next?

We will be releasing the booking forms soon, so keep an eye on your inbox. And if you are new to the Guild, then we heartily encourage you to join us, for what is sure to be a fun and social time. For now, block off 2-5th October in your calendar. We look forward to seeing you all there!

ABOVE Image by Peter Hall on Unsplash, **MIDDLE** YHA Conwy, Sam Davis, **FAR RIGHT** Image by Bill Eccles on Unsplash



Conwy, with its imposing 13th-century castle, town walls, and proximity to the Snowdonia mountains, has many literary and artistic connections, and has long been attracting artists, photographers, and writers such as:

- **Gerard Manley Hopkins:** The Victorian poet and Jesuit priest spent time in the area, finding inspiration in the local landscapes, including the nearby Elwy Valley, which he celebrated in his poetry.
- **Felicia Hemans:** A 19th-century poet who lived at Bronwylfa near St Asaph (near Conwy) from 1809 to 1825, she wrote “The Graves of a Household” and “The Homes of England” while inspired by the North Wales scenery.
- **William Wordsworth:** While more famously associated with the Lake District, he wrote the poem “We Are Seven,” which is set in Conwy.
- **Charles Tunnicliffe:** An internationally renowned wildlife artist and illustrator who lived in Anglesey and was deeply inspired by the landscapes of North Wales, frequently capturing the surrounding areas.
- **J.R.R. Tolkien:** While not living in Conwy itself, Tolkien was heavily inspired by the North Wales landscape and language, creating his “Elvish” languages based on Welsh.
- **Philip Pullman:** Grew up in Harlech and attended school in the region, noting that the landscape of North Wales informed his writing.

The Conwy Camera Club, established in 1945, has produced 80 years of photographic documentation of the town, including work by Rhodri Clark, who has curated extensive archives of Conwy. The town also hosts Oriel Colwyn, a prominent photographic gallery showcasing local landscape and historical photography.

The Royal Cambrian Academy, based in Conwy, has hosted numerous artists and photographers, including Sir Kyffin Williams and former president Augustus John.

The People's Park

Guild vice president ROLY SMITH, formerly Head of Information at the Peak District National Park and aka "Mr Peak District", celebrates the 75th birthday of Britain's first National Park

The headline to the article in the *Yorkshire Telegraph and Star* of March 7, 1930, was unequivocal. "On Kinder Scout Yesterday. Why it is Unsuitable for a National Park" it shouted.

It went on to describe a walk full of "thrills and dangers" the author took with two companions through a raging blizzard from the Snake Inn along Kinder's northern edges. The walk from Seal Edge to Fairbrook Naze, during which the party had "adventures sufficient to last all of us for many years", convinced the author "that as a National Park, we do not think Kinder Scout will fit the bill."

In sharp contrast at the same time at the southern end of the Peak, the national and local press, supported by such dignitaries as George Bernard Shaw, were campaigning just as vigorously for Dovedale to become a National Park. Backing the campaign by FA Holmes of Buxton for its recognition as a National Park in the Coronation Year of King George VI, GBS apparently compared Dovedale with the view from the Mount of Olives in Palestine.

The Peak District National Park, which was formally designated as Britain's first National Park exactly 75 years ago on April 17, 1951, has often polarised opinion. There are those such as the indefatigable fell-wanderer Alfred Wainwright, who was glad to see the back of Kinder's "glutinous peatbogs" when he was writing his classic *Pennine Way Companion* in 1968.

Earlier still, Daniel Defoe had memorably described the Peak as "the most desolate, wild, and abandoned country in all England," in his *Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1726).

But to the teeming populations of the surrounding towns and cities of northern England – half the population live within 60 miles of its centre – it was, in the words of broadcaster Brian Redhead, "The Great Escape." When Sir Arthur Hobhouse proposed the Peak as a National Park in his 1947 report, he stated: "...beyond its intrinsic qualities, the Peak has a unique value as a National Park, surrounded as it is on all sides by industrial towns and cities.

"There is no other area which has evoked more strenuous public effort to safeguard its beauty. Its very proximity to the industrial towns renders it as vulnerable as it is valuable," he added.

This fact is vividly illustrated by a look at a satellite photograph of Britain at night. With only the streetlights of the surrounding towns and cities visible, the distinctive, cupped-hand shape of the National Park stands out as an island of darkness amid the glowing ocean of the industrial conurbations of northern England and the Midlands.



The headline to the article in the Yorkshire Telegraph and Star of March 7, 1930, was unequivocal;

“On Kinder Scout Yesterday. Why it is Unsuitable for a National Park”

IMAGE ‘The Salt Cellar’, Derwent Edge, Hope Valley by Rob Bates on Unsplash



A park where most needed

There can be no doubt then that the Peak District was a national park where it was most needed. It has been estimated that half the population of the country lives within 60 miles – that's day trip distance – of the Peak, and that's from where the vast majority of its huge influx of over 13 million day visitors come.

And surely the wonder of the Peak is the fact that the walker can still get that unique, away-from-it-all, top-of-the-world feeling on places like the peaty wastes of Bleaklow or Kinder. This is despite the

barely-credible fact that he or she is only a dozen miles from the bustling centres of Manchester in one direction and Sheffield in the other.

In fact, one of the major catalysts in the campaign for the creation of the Peak as a National Park in the 1930s and 1940s was that constant pressure for access, especially to the highest and wildest moorlands of the Dark Peak, by the citizens of the surrounding towns and cities. Those "blue remembered hills" were actually visible to the wage slaves sweating out

their workaday lives in the grimy cotton mills of Stockport and Manchester and in the blistering heat of the steel works of Sheffield. Yet this land which was formerly common for all to use was frustratingly out-of-bounds and forbidden to the weekend Rambler – guarded by belligerent, stick-wielding gamekeepers and 'Trespassers will be Prosecuted' signs at access points.

The whole thorny issue of access to the Peak District moors came to head on Kinder Scout one sunny Sunday in April, 1932. The Lancashire branch of the British Workers Sports Federation had been turned off Yellowlacks on the western flanks of Bleaklow that Easter by a threatening gamekeeper.

So they decided on direct action, reasoning that if there were enough of them, the gamekeepers could not stop them. The proposed Mass Trespass was well advertised in local newspapers, and on the appointed day, about 400 turned up in the sleepy village of Hayfield on the western edge of Kinder.

After a rally at Bowden Bridge quarry, during which a 21-year-old unemployed mechanic named Benny Rothman addressed the crowd, they set off up the Kinder Road, around the Kinder Reservoir, and into William Clough on a century-old right of way. At an appointed signal as they entered the clough, the ramblers struck out onto the forbidden moor below Sandy Heys and encountered a group of stick-carrying gamekeepers who had been lying in wait.





There were a few scuffles and a gamekeeper who had fallen down injuring his ankle was ministered to by caring ramblers. The group went on to reach Ashop Head, where they were joined in a victory meeting by other groups from Sheffield, who had trespassed over from Edale.

Six ramblers were arrested when they returned singing and arm-in-arm into Hayfield, and five were later charged with riotous assembly and tried at Derby Assizes. Ironically it was severity of the sentences – which ranged between two and six months – which united the ramblers' cause, and a record 10,000 people attended an access rally held a few weeks later in The Winnats Pass, near Castleton.

The people's park

Of all Britain's 15 national parks, the Peak can most truly be described as "the People's Park." Not only do the sprawling populations of Manchester, Sheffield, Nottingham and the West Midlands regard it with unalloyed affection and because of its unrivalled accessibility as their own personal backyard, the landscape which we see today, like everywhere else in Britain, has largely been shaped by the local farmers, miners and quarrymen over the millennia.

The men who made the National Park what it became, the pioneer in so many conservation-led policies and projects (see box), were equally men shaped by their backgrounds. It was people like Ald. Norman Gratton, Tideswell born-and-bred former quarryman who was chairman for 22 years; Ivor Morten, urbane vice-chairman and Buxton-based farmer and conservationist, and Lt. Col. Gerald Haythornthwaite and Prof John Tarn, hardline chairmen of the Planning Control Committee, who took the ground-breaking decisions which marked the early years of the park.

But it was the officers who came up with the ideas, led by inspirational bosses like John Foster, Theo Burrell, Harry Brunt and later, Michael Dower, son of John Dower, the man who had originally come up with the blueprint for British National Parks in 1945.

Good conservation such as that practiced by the Peak District National Park Authority is often invisible. So we don't see a 200 mph Grand Prix racing circuit near Hartington and Arbor Low; a steel works in Edale; a motorway cutting through Longdendale, nor more vast limestone quarries, which were threatening to eat away the protected landscape itself. All these were schemes which have been successfully fought off by the Park

authority in its three-quarters of a century.

The authority was, in the words of Environment Minister Denis Howell in 1978 when Parliament debated the Park's Structure Plan, both "a splendid achievement" and "a great national asset." This has surely been proved by the huge numbers which have descended on the Peak for its life-affirming fresh air and freedom during the recent Covid pandemic.

But faced now with ever-decreasing funding from successive Governments and the resultant huge cuts in staff, we must hope that the National Park authority can survive to continue in its unique role as "the People's Park."

LEFT TOP Winnats Pass, Castleton, Hope Valley
LEFT BELOW Curbar Edge, Hope Valley
ABOVE Parkhouse Hill from Chrome Hill, Hollinsclough
All with thanks to Rob Bates on Unsplash
www.robatesphotography.co.uk



Should I bother? I mused... Then I decided, that, Yes, I would invite recipients of my invitation to let me know whether they intended to be there.

The thing is, I knew for certain that most people simply wouldn't reply and that, of those who did take the trouble, at least half of those who said Yes, would fail to materialise, while a similar proportion of those who said No, would actually turn up, smiling, when the day came.

The occasion was the first of two events planned to mark the launch of my book, *Faroese Days*, published in the Faroe Islands by the prolific publishing house, Sprotin.

Both events were scheduled as part of Culture Night, in Tórshavn, the islands' capital. The Faroese love a party and Culture Night has grown since its inception to feature countless pop-up stages across

Faroese Days

Stan Abbott reflects...

the town, featuring live music, poetry, art exhibitions and, of course, the odd book launch.

My first "launch" would be in the back room at Jacobsens Bókahandil, the oldest bookshop in the Faroe Islands, at 160 years. The back room has remained largely unchanged since it moved to its current grass-roofed premises in 1918 and had been the venue of a previous book signing for a novel I wrote, which was set partly in the Faroe Islands.

This would be followed later in the evening by wine, song and readings in a converted laundry in downtown Tórshavn, when I would be one of a trio of authors launching new work.

In all my years visiting the islands, I can't recall an unsuccessful social event, even if catering could often be based on no more than an educated guess. The thing is, when you live on a remote, rugged and generally inhospitable archipelago in the middle of the North Atlantic, the fine weather you need to complete fine-weather-only tasks may come in short supply.

Put another way, in the Faroe Islands, you should make hay when the sun shines, or face having no hay at all. And if the sun is shining on that long June evening when you hinted you might go to Stan's book launch, then "haymaking" or working with the sheep will always win. So, best not to raise expectations by saying days in advance "Yes, count me in!".

Faroese Days is my tribute to the ingenuity, resourcefulness, friendliness and free-thinking spirit of the 55,000 islanders and their stop-start progress along the road towards complete independence from Denmark. It draws upon my experience during close to 25 years of working primarily with Atlantic Airways, the national airline, but also with the tourist board, the airport and a few other businesses. If I have a "second home" it is here, at Europe's wild frontier.

Jackie Skúvadal, an Australian who married a Faroese man and settled in the islands to raise a family, was one of many incomers I interviewed, and her take on Faroese social habits casts light on my own experience.



Faroese people are not so polite, she ventures; but their doors are always open. “You are just sitting eating your breakfast and someone comes in and sits down at the table. You make an arrangement and then

the main islands are connected by long, subsea tunnels: in about 2035, the opening of the 23-kilometre tunnel from Sandoy to Suðuroy, the southernmost island, will mark the crowning glory of a tunnelling

I have done my bit to help deliver that growth over recent decades. But the islands’ tourism team are also super-innovative, with eye-catching campaigns like Faroese-translate (prompting Google to add

...on a quarter century of working in the Faroe Islands

someone just randomly changes it. You could invite someone for dinner and they turn up two hours late.”

You might say it takes a bit of grit to settle: Jackie had to learn two new languages – Faroese and Danish – while being careful not to muddle them. She has to get used to being asked “Where are you from?”, to which her answer is always “Vestmanna!”, the fishing village where she and her husband, who runs boat trips to the towering bird cliffs, have a house with a commanding view across the strait to the island of Vágar.

But what I chose to write about was far broader than the niceties of Faroese manners: it was the extraordinary strides I have witnessed since my first visit, back around 2000. Then, even getting to Tórshavn from the airport was a challenge, involving a ferry crossing through choppy waters. There were only a couple of hotels in town, only one of which even began to approach international standards. Eating out meant bad pizza; having a drink, meant weak beer only.

In an unusually religious society (by European standards), gays could be persecuted and strangers of darker hues were welcome only insofar as someone had to do the unpleasant work in the fish factories that Faroese people no longer fancied.

Fast forward 25 years and now most of

mania that has also seen mountains regularly tunnelled, with new weather and landslide-proof roads completed on a regular basis.

The country’s airline, Atlantic Airways – for which I worked for more than 20 years – pioneered, with Airbus, a highly effective sat nav system to enable the islands’ weather and wind-prone airport to remain open in all but the most adverse conditions – thereby avoiding costly and inconvenient diversions to Iceland, Norway, or Scotland.

Indeed, look at any economic activity – from salmon farming to cutting edge IT – and you’ll see Faroese innovation delivering a competitive edge.

And as for the lousy food, well, now, read Michelin Star-grade fine dining, and the best collection of coffee houses you could want for. Societal change has seen much greater openness, including adding anti-gay discrimination to the statute book.

And did I mention music? The Faroe Islands have more recorded musicians per head of population than surely any other country in the world; equivalent to everyone in Manchester having a music career – not just Oasis et al. I’m happy to have shared coffee with Eivør, the Faroese superstar, who pulls in stadium-size crowds across Europe and America these days.

A key component to the astonishing pace of change in the islands has been tourism growth, and I’m pleased to able to say

the language to its service) and Google Sheep View, when arriving visitors could pick up a special camera at the airport, while many of the islands’ 75,000 sheep carried their own cameras, transmitting online. This year’s big innovation is hire cars preprogrammed with customised itineraries, designed to spread the tourism benefits away from Tórshavn and across all the islands.

I have introduced the delights of these wind and sea-swept islands to many OWPG members and together we’ve delighted in hiking, sea fishing, sailing, horse-riding and many of the other activities on offer in this dramatic landscape.

During Covid, when my work there came to end, I reflected I had a story to tell: Faroese Days: Tradition, Change and Innovation in the North Atlantic is that story.

The UK edition of Faroese Days is now published under the Gravity Books imprint, ISBN 978-1-7393686-6-1

Footnote: there was a great turnout for my event at Jacobsens... the majority had not responded to my RSVP; only about half of those who said they’d come turned up on the day. A good result!

LEFT TOP Stan Abbott on location
LEFT BELOW Yarn bomb at Sandoy
MIDDLE Surf hut at Tjørnuvik
BELOW Bird cliffs



In 1954, when I was 14, two events started me on my nomadic life of mountain exploration. I went to a talk in our village by Tom Stephenson who had just created the Pennine Way. And whilst scrambling around one of our local Peak District crags I found a guidebook to rock climbing. My father bought me a rope and boots and my destiny was sealed!

The following year a friend and I set off on the Pennine Way which crosses our local moors, though we eventually left it to circumnavigate the Lakes. But it was the climbing guidebook that really grabbed me. Exploring our local cliffs we met others of a like mind, some became lifelong friends. One of the lads, Roy, who was older than me lived in an a converted chicken shack on the moor edge. In later years, Roy used to call in at 'Troll', a climbing company of which I became a founding partner, and after enjoying a 'brew', he would say, "I'll have to go, I haven't had an adventure yet". Looking back, he reminds me of Millican Dalton, the "Professor of Adventure" who



in a search of warmer rock, discovered and climbed in Tafraoute, now popular for climbing holidays in the sun. As always I recouped some of the costs by writing for outdoor magazines.

writings of T E Lawrence until we went there in his footsteps in 1984 after seeing the Lawrence film. After months of letters to the Jordanian Embassy in London and the Tourism Ministry in Amman we finally

Have pen, will travel

Tony Howard

lived for nearly fifty summers in a cave near Castle Crag in Borrowdale.

Unrealised by me at the time, these serendipitous meetings with remarkable men (to quote Gurdjieff), were to lead me to a world of rock and deserts and mountains, particularly "on ways less trodden", and as Robert Frost wrote, "that



has made all the difference". My motto was always, 'you never know until you go'. Places like Norway's Lofoten Islands where we went when I was 22 in 1962 were well off the beaten track, as was Morocco where we made a winter ascent of North Africa's highest mountain, Toubkal then,

And whilst hitching home through Norway in '62 we saw (or partly saw - as the clouds were down), Europe's tallest, steepest and then unclimbed north face, the Troll Wall. Who could resist that! I climbed it in 1965, as always with friends, making a first ascent simultaneous to a Norwegian team on another new route. The world press said it was a race - it wasn't. We each climbed our own new route. They topped out the day before us, but who cares? We certainly didn't and Britain's top climber, Joe Brown said, "It must rank as one of the greatest ever achievements by British rock climbers". Who wouldn't be happy with that!

Elsewhere, always on a 'Quest into the Unknown', we wandered across North Africa and the Mid East, exploring and making new climbs in the remote Saharan Hoggar Mountains, and even more remote Kassala and Marra mountains of Sudan and the distant, little known, mountains of Iran. Thrown out by the army, we then rediscovered the 1000 metre cliffs of Bisotun first reported by Tilman, where we once again enjoyed making a first ascent, surviving a wild overnight storm, whilst semi-suspended in our 'Troll' bivouac tent. More amazingly, the now world famous mountains of Wadi Rum in Jordan were also unknown back then, other than in the

not only got permission to go, but were sponsored by the Ministry as we offered to write a guidebook. We were warned to beware of the Bedouin - a townsman's natural fear of nomads - and were advised to take a recommended middle-man from Aqaba. But we didn't. We had by now spent time with other desert nomads, especially in the Saharan countries. Our welcome, even from the poorest, had always been overwhelmingly generous. And so it was in Wadi Rum.

On our arrival we stopped within view of a fort which stood above a few small single storey houses and some traditional 'bait ash shaar', the traditional black tents of the semi-nomadic Bedouin, from which smoke drifted lazily. Having put up our tents we intended to walk to the village but were pre-empted when a young man in white robes and with a dagger in his belt came to greet us. His name was Daifallah, and our faith in their highly reputed hospitality was not to be disappointed. Like all Bedouin he spoke adequate English, putting our minimal Arabic to shame. He wondered why we were there and smiled when we said we wanted to see if the mountains were good for climbing.

"We have climbed everything", he said, "whilst hunting ibex". "We don't need any of that", he added disparagingly, gesturing

“There’s a race of men that don’t fit in, A race that can’t sit still”

The bard of the Yukon, Robert Service.

at our ropes and climbing equipment. “I will take you to my father’s camp in the desert”. Heading south, we were surprised to see yet more mountains which had been previously hidden from view, their sandstone domes rising like petrified cumulus clouds from the orange sands. Finally topping a dune we descended into a concealed sandy hollow ringed by cliffs, then over another dune to arrive abruptly at the hidden camp. His father welcomed us and invited us to sit whilst he prepared coffee, a time honoured ritual show of hospitality when welcoming guests. We were then offered tea whilst we explained why we were there. “We hope to climb your mountains”, we said, “and if the climbing is good, as Daifallah says it is, we can write about it and more climbers will come. If you are not happy with that, then we can leave, but we hope it might be beneficial for you”.

After talking with his father, Daifallah replied, “My father thinks it is a good idea. We know many climbs, so we will be happy to help you. We are making dinner for you. You are welcome to stay tonight”. It was the first of many wonderful days with people who were to become the closest of friends and as luck would have it we soon discovered that their *dina* or traditional tribal area included all the best mountains and trekking areas. It is not considered to be *sabra*, ‘desert’. Nor is it empty, every individual knows the names

of the smallest canyon, valley, sand dune or crack in the mountains. Individual or collective memories are attached to such places which often derive their names from tales told and shared around the campfire - a place which Lawrence rightly called “the university of the desert”. In fact, the mountains and ravines are so complex that without our newfound friends freely imparting their wealth of knowledge we would never have achieved so much in a few weeks.

During this exploratory period we became familiar with the sandstone rocks and their peculiar architecture, as bizarre as Gaudi’s cathedral. At first sight appearing loose and friable we discovered not only that good climbing was possible almost everywhere, but the maze of desert canyons and easier scrambles also offered a wealth of unique trekking and safari potential. With advice and help from our Bedouin friends we also discovered some of their unique climbs to the summit domes of Jebel Rum. We were in awe of their boldness in climbing VS rock on routes of 500 metres or more, often alone and with just a gun for hunting ibex, though we managed to impress them by reaching the top of one of the very few summits they said were still unclimbed.

The Tourism Ministry were also happy and sponsored two more trips to Rum as well funding the initial Cicerone guide to ‘*Treks and Climbs in the Mountains of Wadi Rum*’.

By then we had realised the whole of Jordan was unexplored from the point of view of adventure tourism and we had a

bonanza of discovery over the following years. The Tourism Ministry were busy with other projects but a friend put us in touch with the Royal Palace and HM Queen Noor generously gave us the use of a car and palace driver - wonderful times! The result was a guide to *Jordan: Walks, Treks, Caves, Climbs and Canyons*, later followed by a guide to *Walks, Treks, Climbs & Caves in Al Ayoun*, covering the delightful hills and valleys of the north.

During these years we also found time to slot in exploratory trips elsewhere in the region. In Egypt we climbed and trekked in Sinai and, with the Egyptian Tourism Ministry’s help, in the Red Sea Mountains. There we discovered some mountain areas ripe for adventure tourism development and once again had help from the Bedouin. Later, a friend of ours, Ben Hoffer further developed some wonderful trails there - The Red Sea Trail and The Sinai Trail. But it wasn’t to be. Back in Cairo, Egypt’s Tourism Ministry had an unfounded deep seated mistrust of Bedouin and closed down the trails, thereby destroying a new and important source of much needed income for them, as well as for Egypt. A huge opportunity missed.

In a similar vein, sponsored partially, or more often totally, by tourism companies in Libya, Palestine, Madagascar and North East India, we continued our life of exploration of wild places, in return offering photos, magazine articles and, for our newfound Libyan friends, helping out on their stand at the World Travel Show in London. It was there we made our first contact with Palestine - their stand was



opposite the Libyan stand. They were already familiar with our guidebooks to Jordan, so asked if would we could write a guidebook to their Nativity Trail “for the millennium, in the footsteps of Mary and Joseph 2000 years after the birth of Christ”? And what a delight that was, walking with newfound friends, full of optimism despite the obstacles thrown up by Israel’s occupation which have only ever gone worse. That gave us the idea of making what became the 670km Jordan Trail, and then doing its initial thru-walk with Jordanian friends.

Little known North East India was also on our tick list: “If you can keep your head when all about are losing theirs” is one of Kipling’s better known lines. It also used to be a matter of genuine concern rather than metaphorical for any strangers entering Nagaland. Just a few generations ago they had a notorious reputation as headhunters. I had wanted to go there for years and in 2002 we finally made it. We met the owner of Ashoka Holidays at the World Travel Show and he was interested in developing trekking tours, not only to Nagaland but to other parts of India’s previously closed north east states. He said, “You will find some wonderful places in this almost virgin land which remains under-explored. Experienced hands like yours can do a lot of good for this region, which nature has richly bestowed with great variety”. We were in!

To its north and east are Tibet and Myanmar. Within, are about a hundred tribes including the Khasi Hill People, the Nagas, the Abors of the Upper Brahmaputra and the Monpas of the Himalayan region. Though missionary activity means that much of this region is now Christian, there are still animists in remote regions and Tibetan Buddhism gained its first foothold in India on the Himalayan border.

We had three wonderful trips there to regions with welcoming tribal peoples as well as exploring the trekking, canoeing and wildlife safari potential with our Ashoka guide. We were told we were the first foreigners to report the existence of the Living Bridges of Meghalaya - eco-friendly constructions built by the Khasi Hill People by fixing living roots and creepers across the rivers. The following year we were the first to visit a Naga village on Mount Saramati on the Indian-Myanmar border, then a closed area. Sadly we abandoned our attempt to climb it when the Nagas we were with shot a bear in the night despite our talk with them earlier in the day to emphasise the value of wild life conservation to future adventure tourism. Such is life.

But they were valuable trips and an exploratory canoe trip down from Bhutan’s tiger country was excellent as was the later wildlife safari, and seeing tiger tracks made overnight near our jungle camp. Flying out a few days later, the distant Himalayas were shrouded in cloud. To the east, the jungle mountains inhabited by some of the most welcoming, colourful and interesting of India’s tribal people, rapidly disappeared into the distance, leaving us with more good memories. Ashoka were also happy with our explorations and the photographs and magazine coverage we sent to them.

In summation, I can’t say we made a living from our adventures - selling Troll in 1995 happily sorted that out - but in addition to income from articles, books, guidebooks and lectures, we often received essential assistance with our actual explorations and I can certainly say they were all wonderful times!

Tony Howard is the author of guides to the Peak District, Romsdal, Wadi Rum, all Jordan and Walks in Palestine.

Also two books: Troll Wall and Quest into the Unknown.

P14 TOP Bedouin seeking shade beneath a lone acacia in Wadi Rum.

P14 BELOW Di Taylor high on Sheikh Hamdan’s Route On Jebel Rum. A great classic Bedouin route.

P15 Di Taylor and Mark Khano get a first glimpse of the Gulf of Aqaba whilst exploring a route from Rum for the Jordan Trail.

TOP Sheikh Atieq at his camp where he welcomed us to Wadi Rum and said his sons would help our explorations.

Second The camp of another Bedouin friend. Wadi Rum is beyond the mountains.

Third Mark Khano and Tony exploring the Jordan Trail in north Jordan with the King Talal Dam below.

Bottom Sunset over Palestine seen from above the Mujib Gorge on the Jordan Trail.

